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ABSTRACT

This article suggests the following ways of making material easier for adults to read: using layout and print size to make meaning clear; making audio recordings and simplified versions of printed matter; and increasing the relevance of the content to the reader. Intended for teachers of adults in reading programs, the study also contains a readability formula and instructions on its use; a list of reasons why teachers should use such formulas; tips for re-writing materials; advice on using a checklist to reveal the reading skills required by a text; and steps students can take to track their reading progress. Among the techniques involving layout are the following: write only one thought on each line; justify only the left margin; end lines in sensible places; space material well; use clear print; and use headings. The tips for re-writing material include the following: be clear about the purpose; pick out the main points; make the material seem friendly; involve the readers if you can; write as if you are talking; add a diagram if it helps; and keep the left-hand margin straight. (CML)

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# MAKING READING "EASIER"

**In this article Mary McGarva of Pathways Associates, Northumberland, highlights the importance of paying attention to the readability of written materials. She also outlines a range of ways of making everyday materials easier to read.**

## How do you know if it's the right level to read?

A simple way to find out is to cover up a few [redacted] the words with BLUETAK!

If the reader can replace the words with the original words or with sensible alternatives then it is the right [redacted] to read!

If the reader can't then you have to decide whether:

- to find another, more suitable text
- to focus your teaching on skill development
- to simplify the text in some way
- or to work from both ends at the same time
  - increase the skill of the reader and
  - reduce the difficulty of the text.

The [redacted] outlined in this article are designed to help you when there is an obvious mismatch between the reading ability of the adults you work with, and the reading skill needed to cope [redacted] everyday reading materials.

## Can you make reading easier?

Yes you can!

- The more INTEREST there is in what is written, the easier it is to read.
- The MORE THE READER KNOWS ABOUT THE SUBJECT, the easier it is to read.
- The CLOSER THE LANGUAGE IS TO THE WAY THE READER SPEAKS the easier it is to read.
- SENSIBLE ORDERING of the content makes it easier to read.
- HEADINGS help.
- CLEAR PRINT and a WELL SPACED LAYOUT help make it easier to read.
- Having a REAL REASON FOR READING makes it easier to read.
- In other words RELEVANCY IS VITAL TO EASE OF READING . . . at ANY LEVEL

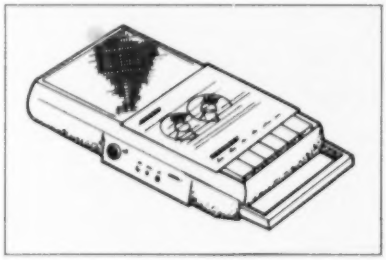
## Write your own reading material

The simplest reading material is about something you know, written in language you understand.

As we are all different this is difficult to buy, but easy to produce.

- *Talk* with the adult about something important to him/her
- *Jot down* some of what s/he says. Take care not to alter the words or 'turn of phrase'.
- *Type* up these sentences, one thought on each line
- *Use* this *as reading* material
- *Develop a file of* typed-up *'writings'* to share with others.

## Record it on cassette



Record an article on a cassette, leaving sufficient pauses between sentences to let the beginner reader:

- follow the print with his/her eyes and ears
- read ahead and then check his/her own reading.

In this way you can support people to read texts they could not otherwise read. The beginner reader is then able to join in any discussion that follows – as an equal.

## Write one thought on each line

It makes it easier for a beginner reader to read if there is only one thought on each line.

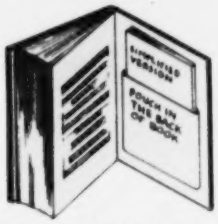
Then his/her eye can take in the complete thought in one glance.

Here is an example.
It is a piece of adult reading material
produced using the LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH.
See ALBSU Newsletter No. 10

Gardening is not as easy as it seems,
it is hard work.
I thought I was fit
until I started work placement . . .
but you should see my blisters!

CE052375

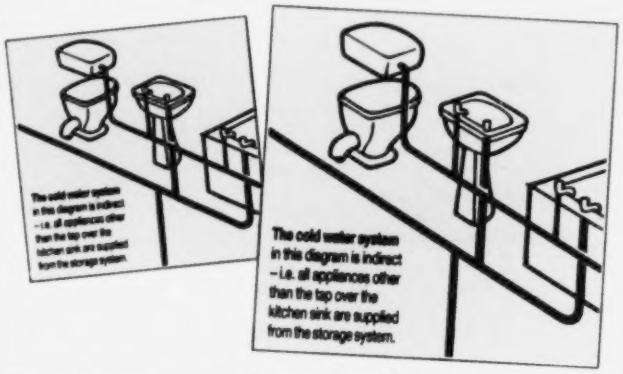
## Make a 'Kangaroo' book



Store a simplified version of the book in a pouch on the back cover.

Then the adult has the choice to read the original *or* the simplification.

## Enlarge using a copier


The cold water system in this diagram is indirect – i.e. all appliances other than the tap over the kitchen sink are supplied from the storage system.

Some photocopiers can enlarge print and reduce it.
ENLARGE to make small print readable.

## Talk until you understand

Talk a lot before you begin reading an article in the newspaper. What is it likely to be about? What does the headline suggest? What – amongst us – do we already know about the incident? Have we any related experiences of our own?

*How* will we read? Every word?

Talk before, talk during and talk after reading. Simply *talk yourself into understanding!*

This is an important simplification technique at all levels. It not only helps the beginner reader anticipate what is coming . . . and so make it easier, it does the same for advanced readers who are trying to make sense of difficult texts.

## Avoid 'Walls' of print

The amount and density of print influences whether or not an article is read. Great blocks or walls of print can be avoided if you justify the print on the left hand side only. You are also less likely to lose your place when you are reading. It's more distinctive.

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## End lines in sensible places

Habitat deciduous woods, especially with oak. Season late summer to autumn. Rare. **Not edible.**

It is important to end your lines in sensible places.

In the mushroom example above splitting 'Not' from 'edible' could end in upset stomachs!

## Re-write it in your own 'most-comfortable' language

There are lots of competency-based accreditation schemes in use in the Youth Training Scheme, in Employment Training, and in Adult Education. They work like this:

*The person claims that she has acquired skills and knowledge and then supports that claim with evidence collected in a range of situations.*

This is great! It puts the learner in the middle of his/her own learning . . . .

*. . . But you cannot claim what you don't understand!*

Talk and talk until you do. Re-write the statements in language you are comfortable with. Work to your own simplified list. The result?

OWNERSHIP of the statements and a commitment to self-assessment. Remember . . . it's the PROCESS that's important.

| Original | Trainee's Own Version |
|---|---|
| ● express disagreement without evoking hostility in discussion | ● disagree with others without hurting them |
| ● reach a compromise satisfactory to all concerned in order to bring about an agreed goal or resolve a conflict | ● split the difference until you agree what to do |
| ● listen attentively to each point of view presented in discussion, and, if asked restate it accurately. | ● repeat a conversation as it was said. |

## Why re-write it?

- to encourage someone to read what s/he might otherwise ignore
- to make reading less intimidating
- to get an important message across
- to encourage 'ownership'.

## Tips for re-writing

- Talk a lot before you start
- Be clear about your purpose
- Be clear who the reader is to be
- Involve the readers if you can
- Pick out the main points
- Write as if you are talking
- Use a friendly 'voice'
- Put ideas in a logical order
- Group ideas under HEADINGS
- End lines in sensible places
- Add a diagram if it helps
- Space things out
- Keep the left hand margin straight.

## Be aware of the demands you are making: Make yourself a checklist

Checklists can help to focus your attention – in turn – on each aspect of a text and on each reading skill needed.

You are then in a position to decide whether to use the text or not and where to focus your teaching to ensure successful reading.

TEXT:..... "Onion Soup" - Fanny Craddock

PURPOSE:..... to decide whether to use it to make onion soup.

| | COMMENTS |
|---|---|
| LEGIBILITY & LAYOUT<br>size and clarity of print<br>spacing and line endings<br>headings and 'signposts'<br>charts/diagrams | not written in usual recipe format with usual headings. |
| CONTENT & ORGANISATION<br>relevance for purpose<br>accuracy<br>need for prior knowledge<br>need to 'tease out' facts | "add a second gill of water". The first "gill" was WINE.<br>gill<br>cannot work out ingredients! |
| LANGUAGE<br>'closeness' to readers'<br>vocabulary<br>grammar<br>style | First sentence very complicated and confusing. The main part of the sentence comes at the end. |

| READING SKILLS | REQUIREMENTS OF TEXT |
|---|---|
| knowing own purpose for reading | necessary for desired outcome |
| picking out relevant facts using headings/key words | " " |
| predicting meaning & sentence order | difficult because of organisation and "unnecessary" noise. |
| skimming and scanning | necessary to find ingredients |
| ordering, sequencing | necessary to find where to start and order of working. |
| reading 'between the lines' | |
| agreeing, disagreeing, questioning, reasoning | necessary to spot confusion between wine and water. |
| identifying discrepancies, omissions | necessary to see that the very precise time given for simmering (35 mins.) is incompatible with "thin.... until it reaches the consistency that you like." |
| recognising bias | |
| working out meanings of words | |
| producing an outcome | It would probably be necessary to make NOTES before making the soup |

PLANS: To look for another recipe!

To use this one to develop 'critical' reading.

## Be clear about your purpose

**If you really want someone to *make* Onion Soup, then find yourself another recipe!**

The ingredients should be listed. The instructions should be concise and written in the order that the job is to be done. It would be foolish to use this recipe as it is, and foolish to waste time simplifying it! There are lots of easier-to-follow recipes for Onion Soup! But...

**If you want to simulate active critical reading and discussion . . . or if you want to develop concise writing, then use this text as it is.**

***It's perfect!***

N.B. *Your* purpose for reading may not be the same as the writer's purpose.

### Onion Soup

*By switching from beef to veal stock and again using cheese, onions, salt and pepper with the addition of dry white wine, a bouquet garni and some oil and butter, you can make a gorgeous French soup of l'oignon. Begin by slicing 2lbs of onions or shallots very thinly indeed. Dissolve a rounded dessertspoonful of butter with two tablespoonfuls of oil in a large frying pan. Add the onions.*

*When this mixture is hot, let it cook very slowly over a low heat until they are soft. Turn them occasionally of course. Then add a heaped tablespoonful of flour and work this well in with the back of a wooden spoon until the mixture becomes pasty. Add a rounded eggspoonful of dry English mustard and 1 gill of wine. Allow this to come to simmering point and then stir to a smooth paste. Add a second gill of water, vegetable water or stock. At this point scrape the whole mixture into a roomy saucepan, put it back over a moderate heat and then thin the mixture down with more of your chosen liquid until it reaches the consistency that you like. Now add another gill and a half, because you are going to simmer it for 35 minutes which will reduce the liquor down to the point where you approved of it. Now taste it and correct the seasoning. If possible, let it get cold and reheat it the next day. It tastes much better. When it is reheated, pour it into bowls over little rounds of toasted French bread covered thickly with grated Gruyere cheese.*

(from The Daily Telegraph Cook's Book)

## Work out the 'readability index' of your materials

You can work out the difficulty level of materials by using one of the many READABILITY FORMULAE

A readability formula generally measures the difficulty of a text by the incidence of long sentences and long words.

*It does not take into account content, or sentence construction or the adult's existing knowledge!*

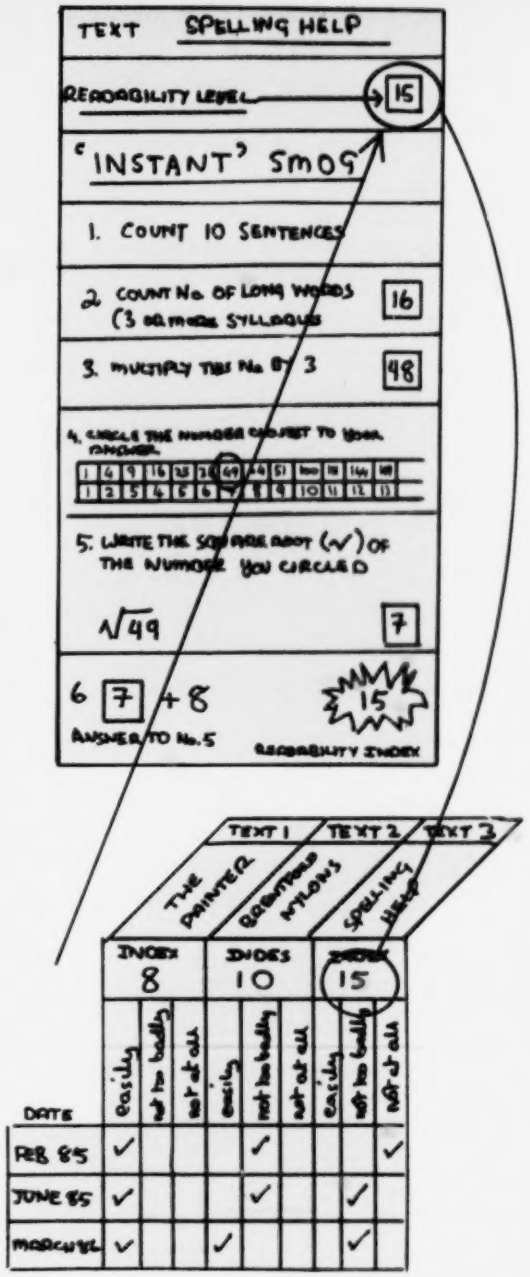
. . . and of course *these contribute* a great deal *to the success* a person has with reading.

To apply one of the formulae
e.g. SMOG, FOG, FRY
is also very time consuming.

So I use my own 'instant' version of the SMOG formula, a version that adults can easily apply themselves.

*But I do take the results 'with a pinch of salt!'*

If you do decide to use a formula, then you need to *stick to the same one* . . . for consistency. It's exactly the same as weighing yourself on your own bathroom scales . . . You need to stick to the same scales if you want to know if you are making or losing weight!




BETTS LEVELS (56)

| | |
|---|---|
| EASILY | 99-100% |
| NOT TOO BADLY | 95-98% |
| NOT AT ALL | <95 |
| LEVEL | % ACCURACY |

## Keeping track of reading progress

***Step 1:*** Use the 'BLUETAK' method to find 3 texts.

- a text you can read 'easily'
- a text you can read 'not too badly'
- a text you cannot manage at all.

***Step 2:*** Use a formula to work out the level of difficulty of all three texts.

***Step 3:*** Re-read the same 3 texts three months later.

If you can now read 'easily' the text you read 'not too badly' you have EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS.

If you can now read 'not too badly' the text that frustrated you then you have EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS.

***Step 4:*** Record progress.

## Readability formula – *are they worth using?*

**Yes** if it can be done quickly
- to *establish the level* of difficulty of your materials
- to *grade* your materials

**Yes** *if used alongside the 'Bluetak' method* of matching reader and text
- to *establish the levels of material each person can cope with:*
  - on his/her own
  - with support

**Yes** if you use this knowledge
- to make sure that *'homework' reading is well within present ability*
- that *'stretching' texts* are worked on *in class* when support is on hand.

**Yes**
- to *keep a track of READING PROGRESS*


| *Author* | *Title* | *Publisher* | *Date* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Craddock | Daily Telegraph Cook's Book | Telegraph | 1979 |
| Gillham B. | Readability | Newcastle | 1977 |
| Phillips | Mushrooms | Pan | 1981 |
| RSAB | Practical Communications Profile | RSAB | 1986 |
| Thompson A. | Text Assessment | unpublished | 1980 |
| | Reader's Digest Complete DIY Manual | Reader's Digest Association Ltd | 1981 |